

THE NEW RESISTANCE

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The reader of this paper might be tempted to think of it as a reply to Richard Noss's "Ungrounded Transformer" (hereafter UT). Let him, then, for it is. Yet it is more, too. It is a glimpse at Truth through the mirror of error.

In UT we find a number of serious misunderstandings of transformational grammar (hereafter TG). It is important to see precisely what these misunderstandings are in order to understand just how far wrong UT really is.

First, let us consider the example cited in UT:

- (1) Flying planes can be dangerous.

Sentence (1) is simply out of date. In the first place, vast improvements have been made in air traffic since (1) was first uttered. In the second place, (1) is prior to the Aspects Motel (hereafter AM), a research institute located in a Holiday Inn south of Cambridge. These days linguists are concerned more with sentences like the following:

- (2) Frying prawns can be dangerous.
- (3) Flawing planes can be dangerous.
- (4) Flowing prunes can be dangerous.

It is, furthermore, a highly interesting fact that all these three sentences actually occurred: (2) was said by a Thai student in a friend's kitchen; (3) was overheard at a convention of geometers; and (4) can still be seen scribbled in a crabbed hand across the wall of a stall in a men's room at Brown University.

So, when Noss cites this as an example, he must do so knowing that real progress has been made elsewhere. In addition, Noss seems to believe that Chomsky believes that there are ideas in the deep structure which are well formed. This has always been a serious source of misunderstanding. There are no "ideas" in the deep structure. If Noss really needs "ideas" he can obtain them from Katz and Fodor Enterprises, Cambridge, Mass. They will, most of them, be sent in a plain brown wrapper.

But let us examine Noss's argument more closely at this point. He claims that there are, indeed, well-formed thoughts which are not susceptible to description in the grammar. That is to say,

deep thoughts for which there are no deep structures. This has long been recognized, of course, and the constraints governing them are called deep strictures.

There are, it is to be understood, three types of things which may be thought, but not uttered. The first of these is the unspeakable:

- (5) I'll be a ... how in the world did you ... the nerve of ...

In addition to this, there is the inexpressible:

- (6) The simplicity criterion on conditional aspects of rational fantasy oriented speculative domains of near-possible patterns does not ... does not ... does not what?

And, finally, there is the ineffable, as seen in:

- (7)

It seems odd that Noss should have missed the obvious.

Noss further states that Chomsky is the "leading offender". Empirically this is just not the case. There must be dozens of linguists, structural as well as transformational, who are much more offensive than Chomsky.

Let us now look at the matter of the "duck". Noss reports on an experimental situation (hereafter Noss, ES) in which the subject, a child, was repeatedly asked to draw a "duck" for the principal investigator. The child was told that if his duck were successful, he would be given "merkmallos". Each time the duck was presented, naked on a plate, tame, fuzzy and babylike, the principal investigator expressed disappointment. Presumably the child never got his treat, either. The point of all this, other than simple cruelty, was to demonstrate that the word "duck" was ambiguous in English, and, further, that we could use expressions like "draw me a duck" without children ever dreaming of what we are really up to. For, to use his words, "that's the way communication works".

Recent investigation by generative semanticists have supplied us with the answer, particularly with respect to the word "duck". See the figure at the end of the next page for the analysis of the sentence "the duck flies". The phrase marker is somewhat incomplete, of course, but that's for the sake of brevity. This analysis should make it abundantly clear that "duck" is absolutely unambiguous in deep structure. The transformations necessary to derive this sentence are DEGROUNDING, DUCK REPL, and QUACK-DEL.

As for the rainbow model of generative syntax, we note again that it is considerably out of style. First, there is no pot at the end, only grass, as we will see. The most plausible model is one derived from an ancient Sanskrit grammarian, the Generative Bovine Model (hereafter GBM). Here grass is considered analogous to deep structure, as an essential grammatical nutrient. The mediating agent is seen as a bull, operating with its several stomachs (recursive PS rules) and miles of intestines (transformations) to produce its familiar output. Those linguists who perceive grass as the surface structure are simply living in a biological fantasy.

Note must also be made of a factual inaccuracy, with Noss's example "his brick-laying's finished". Noss failed to specify the color or shape of the brick. That is, bricks can be red or yellow. This would make his example 400 ways ambiguous. If we further realize that brick-laying may be done by union or non-union workers, the ambiguity climbs to 1600. Probably for professional brick-layers, it is even more ambiguous, for they know things about bricks that we've never dreamt of.

Finally, Noss has a weak grasp of electrical technology. He need not consider ungrounded transformers dangerous. With the kind of resistance to potential that he demonstrates, he is quite safe.

